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The Challenge

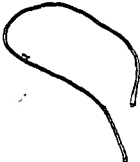
OF OUR

Prairie Provinces

By
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THE CHALLENGE OF OUR PRAIRIE PROVINCES

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OUR Prairie Provinces ! An area 800 by 400 miles ! To be covered in two thousand words ! It might have been done one day, and well done. The old man was ninety, locks white, yet lithe of limb, sure-footed, and his eye not yet dim—a relic of the good old days, grieving for the glory that was gone ! “Ugh !” he exclaimed, “C.P.R. she spoil dis place ! Last winter went to de bush, camped out six weeks, didn’t catch one bear—C.P.R. she spoil dis place.” Two thousand words might have sufficed before the country was “spoiled.”

But the Prairie Provinces have witnessed too many forward movements to do justice to them in two thousand words. Bears and other fur-bearers still abound in our Northern wilds, and will continue for centuries sources of untold wealth, but the Prairie Provinces are no longer famous principally as hunting grounds—either for bears or buffaloes.

THE WEALTH OF THE WEST

Do material conditions warrant the belief that the time is opportune for a forward movement in these provinces, from the financial view-point? Listen! The total value of field crops for 1918, in these Provinces, was as follows:

Manitoba.....	\$180,507,500
Saskatchewan...	299,438,100
Alberta.....	112,196,700

Total..... \$592,142,300
while the total value of all products for a single year was \$1,251,373,868.

Hon. C. A. Dunning, speaking in 1918 of Saskatchewan, said: "Our provincial production per capita is possibly not equalled anywhere else in the world." It has been supposed that this central province was hard hit in 1919, yet the Premier recently stated that the products for 1919 were in excess of those for 1918.

As further evidence of the material strength of these provinces, note the bank clearings of a few Western cities in 1918:

Calgary.....	\$331,334,577
Lethbridge.....	41,901,114
Edmonton.....	171,015,066
Medicine Hat...	24,088,013
Moose Jaw.....	78,425,563
Regina.....	184,624,031
Saskatoon.....	91,431,885
Winnipeg.....	2,362,734,211

Or take the Western subscriptions to
Victory and Peace Loans :

Manitoba	1917, over	\$32,000,000
	1918, over	44,000,000
	1919, over	41,000,000
Saskatchewan . . .	1917,	21,777,000
	1918,	26,071,450
	1919, over	20,000,000
Alberta	1917,	16,515,000
	1918,	18,999,250
	1919, over	16,000,000
		<hr/>
Total		\$236,362,700

OTHER EVIDENCES OF PROSPERITY

The interest on above loans, at $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. amounts to \$12,999,948.50—practically thirteen millions a year. The automobile licenses for Saskatchewan alone represents a greater sum than the financial objective of all the churches in that Province for the Forward Movement ; in 1917, Manitoba's expenditure for automobiles was nineteen times as much as she spent on education ! Statistics may be multiplied emphasizing the marvellous material prosperity and strength of the three Provinces. What would happen if our people gave as the Lord has prospered them ? What an overflowing of the treasury there would be if we gave good measure pressed down !

SOME SEARCHING QUESTIONS

Does ability limit or gauge responsibility? If so, our financial objective is entirely too low.

Do the Prairie Provinces to-day present to the Church any real challenge for the liberal expenditure of her substance for the extension of the Master's Kingdom within their bounds?

In Manitoba, new areas are filling up, not only in the south-east, but in the northern sections of old Manitoba. In one district south of Lake St. Martin there were found nineteen organized school districts, with eighteen school houses already erected, filled during recent years with English-speaking homesteaders, uncared for, as yet, by the Church.

THE NORTH-LANDS OF THE WEST

Then there is our great new North, with vast lumber berths, where hundreds of men are already employed; with gold-bearing areas and fabulously rich copper belts, where new cities will rise in the not distant future. Will the Church endeavor to reach these new regions, as she reached other opening areas of the Dominion, twenty, thirty, forty years ago?

The rich mineral belts of Northern Manitoba extend westward into Saskatchewan, which also has vast untouched areas. After the influenza epidemic last year, the minister at Humboldt, Saskatchewan, was requested to visit the district north of Englefeldt, to conduct memorial services for persons that had been buried for weeks. It had been supposed that this entire area was held by Roman Catholics, but he discovered a large Protestant community. Many had been there for years without gospel ministrations, no representative of the Church to baptize children, preach the evangel, or comfort mourners in the day of sorrow. These people pleaded for a minister, saying they would prefer to leave the country than continue much longer shut off from Gospel influences.

Another large district south of Tisdale was discovered that had been eight years without religious services. These are only samples, and conditions in Alberta are not different.

Shall we carry the Gospel to the Soldier Colonies in the Smoky River and Peace River Districts? Were we not anxious that Chaplains be in touch with our boys in France? Did we not appreciate the efforts of the Y.M.C.A. in ministering to our young men overseas? Shall we forget that they have spiritual natures because they are now *only* homesteaders? Surely not!

New school houses are being erected by the score, yes, by the hundred, where new settlements are forming in anticipation of railway extension. For a time the school house serves well as a place of worship, but the school house fails to meet the need of the community as a religious centre after a few years. As a result, there is required, after a period of suspended energy in church building, due to the war, a great forward movement in church erection, if the Master's work is to be adequately administered. Ministers require homes, and manses are already in demand. Will the strong help the weak to realize the necessities of community religious life?

THE STRANGER WITHIN OUR GATES

But what of the strangers within our gates—the new Canadians? These present a tremendous challenge to the Church of to-day. At least 43 per cent. of the population of our Prairie Provinces is non-Anglo-Saxon. Their ideals—domestic, social, political and religious—differ vastly from ours. Many, too, have been intellectually dwarfed. They need the very best influences of our Canadian life. If we touch them in the spirit of Christ they will become a magnificent asset to our Canadian civilization. If we fail, they will become a menace to our best institutions.

Shall we lift up these less fortunate, though equally human, beings at our doors, or will we follow an ugly example and pass by on the other side? I sometimes think of good old Elisha and his treatment of those who had fallen into his hands. His servant said, "Shall I smite them?" and he answered "Thou shalt not smite them; would'st thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them, and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the lands of Israel."

Shall we not prepare great provisions—intellectual and spiritual—for these strangers, and bid them not *go* but *come* to the Master? If we do so, we will remove all danger of their ever being a menace, and we will hear the Master's *well done* for assisting Him to care for those other sheep, whom He felt constrained to bring into His fold and who are ready to-day in thousands, right here on Canadian soil, to hear His voice.

But we have *old* Canadians as well as *new*. The Indians are Canada's oldest citizens. We are bound by civil contract, as well as Christian obligation, to

educate and evangelize them. We have done something; but there is still much to be done. There must be no halting, but a forward movement all along the line for many years.

THE CHALLENGE OF OUR GROWING CITIES

Then what of the challenge of our growing cities? We know something of the moral conditions of old-world centres of population. Will we, in Western Canada, with all our God-given ground floor, build cities with reeking slums? We have the elements from which slums will develop, if we stand idly by. To prevent these moral plague spots, we must awaken now, for in a little while it will be too late. Surely we should build better than our sires! If future generations are to rise up and call us blessed, we must act quickly. In our urban centres non-Anglo-Saxon elements complicate the problems. In Winnipeg one school had pupils of twenty-four different nationalities! What is true of Winnipeg is true, in greater or less degree, in every Western city. Social unrest abounds. The only way to permanently allay this spirit is to meet it in the Spirit of Christ. Self-preservation challenges us to renewed consecration.

Sum up the conditions of life in Western Canada! Material prosperity, unprecedented opportunity with all its

temptations unlimited, unevangelized elements touching us on every hand! What does history, either sacred or secular, teach of the effects of such conditions? Will we be warned in time and take up the task that God in His goodness has brought us face to face with, or will we let slip our opportunity and show ourselves animal enough to be satisfied with the material good that is accumulating in such abundance?

But by far the greatest of the challenges that come to us to-day is the vision of the suffering Christ. We professing Christians gather periodically around His table to remember His death and dying love. Will He be satisfied with our formal periodic remembrance of *His sacrifice* if we live in the spirit of selfish greed, ignoring His commands, and neglecting the claims of His people? Do not these conditions, claims, relations and opportunities constitute a challenge strong enough to lead our best young men to invest their lives in the Master's service, and incidentally in the highest form of service in the actual sphere of nation-building? "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

INCENTIVES THAT PROMPT TO ACTION

Are there any incentives prompting to action in some measure commensurate to our ability? What of the history of the past? Many of us like to recall the vision and insight of that great leader, Dr. Robertson. The memory of his zeal for the West is an inspiration to many of us still. What unremitting toil! What heroic attempts to awaken the Church to our then latent possibilities! Shall we lose the vision? When good old Joshua gathered the people about him, as he sat under his oak tree at Shēchem, he recorded their stout pledges of loyalty, but not without foreboding. Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, but days of decline came, and with spiritual decline national trouble. The elders that over-lived Robertson are rapidly passing, yet He, greater than Robertson, abides. His promise is "Lo, I am with you alway."

Shall the work so well begun flag or falter? Place the statistics of 1884, for the Prairie Provinces, beside those for 1919—and see what God has done for the West in thirty-five years! Surely we can thank God for the past, and take courage for the future. "Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of Thy habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes."